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Co-Chairs Senator John Fonfara, Representative T.R. Rowe, and Committee Members
Legislative Program Review and Investigations
Room 506 Capitol building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Chairman Fonfara, Rowe, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Farmland Protection Program. I have benefitted from the program from two distinct perspectives.

First, as a citizen of Connecticut, I enjoy the results of a robust program achieving its mission of farmland preservation. These acres will only be used for the purpose of agricultural production. The products add over 3.5 billion dollars to our economy, as UCONN has documented in recent economic impact studies. It is difficult to value the security and pleasure of a local agricultural economy but it is substantial and we do need it to survive.

Secondly, I am an agricultural producer. My brother and I farm 800 acres. We milk 270 cows and manufacture a value added product from the manure, CowPots™. My sister in law operates a successful roadside stand on the farm. We own 455 acres and rent the balance. The original farm had 200 acres and was a sufficient base for my family a generation ago.

As my generation began to work the farm opportunities became available to expand the farm or face the uncertainty of nearby acres being developed. If the land were developed, we would face two obstacles: first, we would not have the productive acres; second, we would now have neighbors close to our agricultural operation who likely have nonagricultural preferences especially during seasons busy with heavy equipment operating during long days and associated sights and smells.

Our farm cannot compete in the real estate market for agricultural land. When the farm next door became available in 1985, the retiring farmer sold the development rights to Connecticut through the Farmland Preservation Program, and the agricultural rights to my brother and I. That allowed our farm to have the security to sustain our dairy herd with modest growth to meet the economic demands of two young families and finalize the transfer of the business to my generation.

In 2008 we had another opportunity to work to preserve the farm across the street. We had rented the land since 1966 and the owner's heirs wanted to sell the land. They did not want to participate in the program; rather they wanted to sell the land outright. We were faced with an opportunity to secure land for the next generation and consolidate the block of land that we owned. However, we had to take a risk that the FLP program would be there to purchase the development rights if we bought the land.

During this period funding was sufficient and 55 acres scored high enough so that we were able to close a deal to sell the development rights in 2009. The land that we have preserved backs up to the 15000 acre Centennial State forest and joins that block of open space with two important river corridors. So in addition to keeping land in production the preserved space amplifies the preservation efforts of the State Forest system.

Thank you for hearing remarks on this important program,

Benjamin Freund